

Governor Lamont's Proposed Budget for 2023-24

Good afternoon, members of the Education and Appropriations Committee. My name is Maite Gil and I live in Danbury. I am here to speak on the Governor's proposed Budget for Elementary & Secondary Education (HB6659).

[INTRODUCTION]

- I'm a resident of Danbury for 18 years, I have two daughters one graduated from Danbury High School a few years ago, recently moved to New Jersey and works in a chain supermarket, my youngest attends the last year of High school in Danbury.
- I'm a member of the community and I'm writing this testimony to advocate for our public school system to receive the funding it needs to educate all our children.

I am here today both to ask that the legislature increase funding for Danbury Public Schools and not support funding for the proposed charter school in Danbury.

- My daughters always attended the Danbury Public Schools, both needed help with math, an English and other classes, the teachers were supportive by offering help with the subjects. My daughters always accepted the help they were offered, I helped the best I could, English is not my first language, so it was difficult for me to advocate for my daughters' education.
- I know that the classrooms were overcrowded because I heard parents complaining about it, my daughter also complained about it as well especially in the high school. Teachers, aides and staff do what they can to provide the best education possible but without the resources they need I don't think the future looks bright for our children.
- I know that the Public School System needs more bilingual staff, teachers and administrators to help and support parents/children to succeed, more buildings (schools) need to be built to house the children that are "overcrowding our schools" I believe the money that is proposed in the budget should go entirely to Danbury Public School System.
- Neither the city of Danbury nor the state have met their financial obligations to the public school system. Danbury Public Schools have not had a fully-funded municipal budget in nearly 20 years. The state's ECS formula has not been fully funded either, which has exacerbated the problem at the local level.

- This cumulative lack of funding has resulted in overcrowded schools, staffing issues, and budget cuts that have compounded over decades. Funding another model that will serve only a fraction (6%) of our students does not make fiscal sense and it harms most of the students that the school system serves.
- The district is working on providing choice to ALL high school students through the planning and development of a 2nd Danbury High School campus (the Career Academy) and the implementation of career pathways that incorporate experiential learning opportunities for students in areas of interest that will offer them stronger opportunities for employment after high school and advanced preparation for higher education if they choose to pursue that. Diverting district money to support a charter school will not allow the district to adequately fund this project, a project that when completed will serve all students and families in this city who attend public school.

In addition, a charter school in Danbury will contribute to the underlying funding problem in Danbury Public Schools by drawing more funds away from the public school system. A charter school will take much-needed money away from our current schools and most of the children in Danbury in the following ways:

- Transportation costs of at least \$600,000 for 2 buses to transport an initial class of 110. To put this in perspective, this is the cost of hiring 3-4 much needed school counselors at the middle and high school level.
- Special education costs - this could mean diverting current staff to the charter school, or hiring special educators specifically for the charter school. Either way, it results in a significant additional cost to the school district in order to serve the same number of students it is serving now.
- School nurse and custodial staff for the charter school. Again, additional annual costs that need to be absorbed by the district in order to serve the same number of students.
- DPS will also lose the state funding for any students who enroll in the charter school, but the loss of those students will not result in a net-positive for the district in terms of space or funding. In other words, because students will come from across the district's schools, the shift will have no measurable positive impact on the current staffing/space needs of the district. Rather, it will only exacerbate the space and staffing issues by diverting much needed funds from the existing schools.

As a member of the Danbury Community and a _____(parent, student, educator, other title), I urge you to consider the damage it will cause our public school system and our students if financial support is provided to a facility that will compete with it for funding. If you want to put more education dollars into Danbury, please do it by providing funding to the public schools as we face the significant operating

costs for a much-needed 2nd high school campus and program expansion at the high school level to prepare our students for the future.

Sincerely,

Mite Gil.